

Penny and Rev. Phillip Hanson Interview, 12/12/2019, in the afternoon, Claverdon, Warks.

Mrs Penelope Hanson (nee Adams), born 1949.
Rev Phillip Hanson, born 1946.

Penny and Phillip were married in St Swithun's on 15th September 1973, thought to be the last to be married in the church. Photographs of the wedding and the marriage certificate are held on file.

Penny says her father was in the army in Nigeria and they returned from there when she was 10 years old (1959 / 1960) and they initially stayed in Norton Barracks. Her mum was keen to find a church to go to and after visiting many she settled on St Swithun's, even though the only service was Evensong. Father Denlegh-Maxwell was very welcoming and had two children a similar age to Penny and her sister. The choir had at least a dozen people with a cross bearer etc. She remembers that in the evening the church could have up to 50 people.

The congregation were exclusively St Swithun's and apparently her family were disappointed that her confirmation took place in St Martin's – many from St Swithun's objected to the 'idols' in St Martin's and complained about the heavy use of incense. People regarded St Martin's as more Catholic than the Catholic Church. She has no idea why her confirmation took place there.

Penny says her mother was very influential with Church and the Cathedral and worked very hard to put her wedding together including a choir.

Burials, she says that there were no burials at St Swithun's or St Martin's during her time in the congregation. All those who passed away at that time ended up in Astwood Bank Cemetery. Phillip suggests that the parish's burial register would quickly establish when the last burials in St Swithun's took place.

Several boys from the College for the Blind used to make their way down to St Swithun's every Sunday with their carers. They would usually walk and used to love hearing the bells and the sense of the box pews.

She also remembers the choir and how she and her sister when part of the choir they would take it in turns to sing words for fun. She says she thinks the church was short of people to have asked them as neither were good singers.

Phillip remembers that her parents always sat in the same pew. There was no charge for pews and at the time Penny attended no-one kept records of who's pews were who's – everyone just knew and it would be seen as rude to take someone's without permission.

I asked Penny if she knew the north wall and tower were medieval but she said she didn't.

Apparently the vicar always preached from the pulpit.

Penny and her sister went to Cherry Orchard school, off Bath Road, and her sister was taught by Miss Elgar, a niece of Sir Edward Elgar.

Penny says her parents would have been thrilled to see the church coming back to life as part of the current project – she said they were very upset when the church was made redundant. Phillip adds that he thinks the church will now become a much more interesting place than if it had struggled on with a tiny congregation.

When I mentioned about access to the hidden parts of the church they both said they'd be interested in seeing that.

Both thought that at around the time they got married there were whisperings about politics occurring related to it being vested to the CCT. The vicar of St Swithun's at the time of their wedding (1973) was also vicar of St Martin's and would do one in the morning and one in the evening. Penny suggests there were some very strong willed people at St Martin's who knew exactly how they wanted things to go.

Talking about St Swithun's. She said it was a lovely day, raining in the morning. She has a heated aside about how terrible the public toilet outside the church was and how their photographer had to be very creative. Their reception took place at the old Bishop's Palace. She said there was a huge choir. The door they used for getting in and out for the wedding was the West entrance, beneath the tower. She mentioned that the school house next door was a coffee room for the church.

Penny mentions that it's surprising how attached people get to the fabric of their own church.

'Morning Has Broken' Cat Stevens version was played at their wedding.

Penny and Phillip had moved away when the church closed down. Her parents were devastated when it happened and described it as a bereavement experience. The collision of two completely different congregations after it's closure was a marked difference in how things had been.

She says her parents would be thrilled to know it was being brought back to life.

She mentions that St Martin's was always known as a chapel of ease to St Swithun's.

END of interview.



